

Non-Perishables **John 6:24-35**

I always imagined that I would be the sort of person who would make a good impression if I were introduced to a celebrity; someone famous. I wouldn't sweat profusely, or gush about what a huge honor it was, or say something incredibly stupid that would haunt me the rest of my life. No, I would be witty and sophisticated, and intelligent. I would charm the socks off of them.

I got the chance to see just how smooth I would be when I was in college. Now, granted it wasn't Kevin Bacon or Don Johnson or anyone like that, but in the world of youth ministry this guy was huge. His name was Denny Rydberg, and he's the president of Young Life now. I was working as a youth ministry intern, and one of my responsibilities was helping organize a presbytery-wide retreat for Senior Highs. Denny was our speaker, and I was given the job of picking him up at the airport. Almost immediately I decided to abandon any hope of coming off intelligent and sophisticated, and just settle for not humiliating myself, which required total silence on my part. And I was doing okay with that, until he mentioned that he hadn't had lunch yet and asked if we could go through the drive through at Burger King. I gave them his order, pulled around to the window, handed the girl his money, gave him his change, put the car in gear and drove off. Without his food. I think it is probably fair to say that what I said next did nothing to make me look charming or refined.

Jesus was no Kevin Bacon either, but he was something of a local celebrity in the Galilee region. And sure enough, people seemed to get a bit tongue-tied around him. Of all of the things I would like to have asked Jesus, "how did you get here," would not have been one of them. I imagine that the wife of the poor guy who said that gave him grief all the way home that night. "You could have asked him anything: make my mother well or straighten out poor Timmy's twisted leg or if he could get Bobby a job, anything in the world, and 'hey Jesus, how'd you git here?' was the best you could do?"

What makes the question especially funny is that these people had just rowed their boats all over creation looking for him. The little flotilla of boats had started out in Tiberius, on the lower west side of the lake, rowed across it to where Jesus had fed all those people, realized he wasn't there, got back in their boats and rowed all the way back across to Capernaum at the north western end of the lake. They've spent long hours tracking him down, and then when they find him they act surprised to see him – well Jesus, what brings you here?!

To his credit, Jesus doesn't roll his eyes or point out how ridiculous their question was. And while it had to be tiring to be constantly followed, constantly on-call, he recognizes that these people have to be given some credit. They took the initiative to go find him, and they expended no small amount of energy crisscrossing the lake two times in row boats. They must have really, really wanted to see him.

So, while Jesus was glad they had come, he also knows that he probably wouldn't be able to give them what they had come for. It must have seemed like a funny conversation to them later on. "What did you talk with him about?" their friends would ask. "Well, we talked about food," they would say. "I guess. But I'm not really sure we were talking about the same thing." It was the

same kind of conversation Jesus had with the woman at the well: “We talked about water, I guess. Only, no, it really wasn’t water.” And Nicodemus: “we talked about being born, sort of. At least I thought we were. I never really got what he was saying.” And the Pharisees: “He gave a man back his sight, but then said that we were the ones who were blind. It didn’t really make a lot of sense to us, but we’re fairly sure he didn’t mean anything nice by it.”

Actually, they were talking about food. Jesus was talking about hunger. They had come hunting for him after the fish and bread incident. Pretty cool thing that he did, feeding all those people. And, what a coincidence! It’s dinner time again. Will there be more fish and bread on the menu tonight, Jesus? We sure are hungry after all that rowing.

And you’ll be hungry again in four hours, Jesus tells them. And tomorrow, and the day after that. And yes, I could give you a million dollars, but then you’ll wake up tomorrow morning with a whole new set of worries. I could make your daughter get up and walk, but she still won’t live forever, you know that, don’t you? I could solve all of today’s problems. Give you your heart’s desire. Even promise that nothing will ever hurt the people you love, and that your children will grow up to be successful and independent and happy. But ultimately, it won’t change your life one iota.

You think it’s food you want, that you crave; that a trip to Marble Slab will take away the sting of a disappointment. Or that a get-away will fix what ails you, maybe a week on the beach to let all your cares melt away, or a cruise where you can be pampered. You think that the commercials are right, that if you’ve got your health, you have everything. You long to live on Walton’s mountain, where all your family’s problems can be solved in sixty minutes and no one ends up in jail or pregnant or addicted to anything. If only you had this one thing, this one need met, this one hunger fed, you would be satisfied. Until tomorrow, and then you’ll be hungry again. This might fill you up for a little while, make you happy for a little while, but then something else will come along. Some other need. Some other fear. Some other restlessness. Some other desire. Some other empty place inside you.

Jesus is hunted down by people who are hungry. And he doesn’t refuse to feed them, what he tells them is to figure out what they are really hungry for.

I just finished an amazing little book called *Gift of the Red Bird*. It would be a gross oversimplification to say that it chronicles the author’s spiritual journey after her family is killed in a car accident, but that’s the hook they use on the cover to get you into it. In a way the book is a retelling of the story in Genesis where Jacob wrestles with God and walks away with a limp but a new life. Through her grief, through the birth of her daughter six months later, through an illness that lands her in bed for eight months, the author slowly begins to see how she has been using people and things to fill voids in her life: food made her feel safe; clinging to people and throwing herself into her work gave her identity. At one point she cries out to God, “what do you want from me?” and God answered, “I want you to want me more than you want anything [your family, your health, control of your life, security]....That will change everything.” Not to want something *from* God, just God himself.

John doesn't use the word "miracle" much. He prefers the word, "sign." Signs point to something. They show us the way. Jesus never said to them that they shouldn't be hungry. And since he fed the crowd yesterday we can also assume that there isn't something somehow wrong with our physical hungers. We do need food. We do need rest. But most of our hungers are trying their darndest to point out to us that we need something else, that we have a deeper desire. Something besides food. Something besides a new car, or good health or being popular. Bread and fish will leave you hungry again in a few hours. Your new countertops will be out of style in a few years, and in another couple of decades today's cheerleaders and football players are just going to look like account execs or someone's mom. None of that will leave you satisfied forever.

There's only one thing that can do that. Only one person who can do that. The hungry crowd came to Jesus hoping for a miracle, for bread. He offered them something far better: himself. The bread of heaven. How often have we come to him wanting something from him, wanting him to fix this or give us that, promising that if he'll take care of it, we won't bother him any more? We'll have everything we need.

The bread of heaven is what we need. Christ himself. The only thing that will satisfy our hunger – for love, for peace, for security, for joy.

Let us pray: